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Soviet ABM-Pact Breach Reaffirmed by Reagan

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President Reagan told Congress yesterday that he stands by earlier assertions that the Soviet Union has failed to comply with six past arms agreements and might be preparing a national defense against attack by U.S. ballistic missiles.

"We have deep, continuing concerns about Soviet noncompliance" with the 1972 Antiballistic Missile (ABM) treaty, Reagan said, citing Soviet construction of a missile detection and tracking radar near the city of Krasnoyarsk.

The report comes amid apparent progress toward a U.S.-Soviet agreement to reduce intermediate-range nuclear forces sharply, including the possible elimination of medium-range missiles in Europe.

Two other Soviet missile defense activities—involving the testing of smaller radars and the operation of Soviet air defenses—were judged to be ambiguous but nonetheless "potential" or "probable" violations of the ABM treaty, as they were in

several previous administration reports on Soviet noncompliance.

But Reagan did not accept a stronger Defense Department allegation that the Soviets are preparing a nationwide missile defense, and the report specifically states that activities cited by the department—including the construction of two large radars and improvements to the missile interceptor network around Moscow—"appear to be consistent with the ABM treaty."

Senior U.S. officials said this language was included at the request of representatives of the Central Intelligence Agency and the State Department, who were highly skeptical of the Pentagon's claim.

The report also alludes to new evidence that came to light in January, which some officials interpreted as evidence of a concerted Soviet effort to meet the administration's compliance concerns. The evidence included reports of changes in the appearance of the Krasnoyarsk radar and the dismantling of several suspect Soviet radars, according to the officials.

But the report said the evidence "did not necessitate a change in any of the findings," partly because of "the developing nature of the information at the time" the report was drafted, and partly because of "certain ambiguities associated with it."

Reagan's overall conclusion contrasted sharply with the conclusions in a report last month by Stanford University arms control experts and former government officials that "overall, U.S. and Soviet compliance with the terms of existing arms control agreements has been good."

One of the allegations, involving a "likely" Soviet violation of a treaty limiting the explosive force of underground nuclear tests, was challenged in January by Roger Batzel, director of the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory where U.S. nuclear weapons are designed. In testimony to Congress, Batzel argued that the Soviets "appear to be observing" the treaty limits, and that in any event the military significance of the alleged violations was not "very significant."

This view was bitterly fought by Pentagon representatives, however, and a White House decision was made to maintain the charge while additional studies are made of the issue. The report promised that the U.S. assessment will be "updated" when the studies are completed.